

# OF A NEW STYLE IN ARCHITECTURE. THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION.

At a meeting of the association on Friday, the 5th instant, a paper "On a new Style in Architecture" was read, of which we give the following portion:—"The ancient style of Roman architecture was revived with the arts of painting and of sculpture, receiving such additions as were demanded by a state of increased luxury. There is no doubt that for its ascendancy the classic style was greatly indebted to its sculpture, from which the great artists of the sixteenth century learnt the elements of their arts, and naturally extended their admiration and study to the relics of coeval architecture. The influence of such examples soon became felt throughout Europe. In Britain, which seems always to have signified itself by economy in matters of art, brick supplied the place of stone, oftentimes in edifices of much importance. It must be confessed that the mixture of the two materials was not altogether unfavourable to the results. The Palladian school adorned this country with many admirable buildings, but gave place to the school which formed the most rapid productions ever dignified by the name of architecture. A rage arose for what was called pure Greek art, by men who merely copied the dimensions of ruined temples, and were utterly ignorant of the spirit of artists. If the common sense of mankind had allowed it, they would have covered the land with hypæthral dwellings, for windows were not so much in the style. To be in style they abandoned their material of brick as a surface; they stuccoed and painted their abortions to imitate blocks of stone, because Greek temples were marble. Though they used paint on their elevations, they never thence attempted to make a beauty: it had not been proved to their satisfaction the Greeks had a gift for polychromatic decoration. The Greeks, in their opinion, were too pure for colour. If it had been practicable, they would have had their works black-lined drawings in the air, so droll an opinion had they of Greek refinement. This race of blockheads is not extinct; the surveyors of this day have the same itch for copying, in spite of the introduction of cast iron. They copy interminably, and scarcely one attempt has been made to strike out any beauty of which the material may be susceptible. Some copy classic, and others gothic; they deride the abuses of each other's styles, and are equally ignorant.

"So one fool lolls his tongue out at another,  
And shakes his empty uddle at his brother."

They are equally ignorant of the very rudiments of composition,—that art by which masses are balanced without uniformity,—and they are justly the targets for the ridicule of painters and sculptors. A column, ready made, is built as a monument, because composition requires ability; the column is surmounted by the abacus, even a Corinthian, though there be no architrave for it to sustain, or with which it is to harmonise; thus the abacus becomes useless, and, seen diagonally, top-heavy and unmeaning. The ancient cornices, which are always placed on modern dwellings, are so unsuited to the dimensions of our brick walls, that, to prevent them from falling off, we must balance their weight by building an attic or a balustrade upon them, or we must resort to clumsy expedients of construction to tie them down with iron rods. Thus reviewing some of the absurdities committed in the name of style, considering the requirements of our materials, brick and iron,—considering that the architect is degraded by the importance of style, that he sees no beauty in any thing not according to precedent,—I cannot but wish that some man of genius should arise and produce a system less conventional, and more adapted to our wants. If this could be obtained, we should not find men tolerated in calling themselves architects whose pretensions to the title consist in the possession of certain books. We should more frequently find men who, when they have acquired the knowledge of styles, consider that they are but scholars who have just mastered the grammar of their art, and then we should also find that men of general talent and education could appreciate architectural beauty,

when their opinion of architectural ugliness could not be swamped by the assertion, that the ugliness is in style. How absurd is the whim of one man for making the two sides of his design uniform to the minutest particle; when convenience requires a modification, how ludicrous his struggles for monotony! Yet let us not laugh at him sooner than his rival, who declares that his style admits of any thing, and does his best in his works to illustrate the meaning of "higgledy-piggledy." The strongest argument to be urged against the neglect of style is that founded on the association of ideas; but this is an argument of more force in imagination than in reality. It is true that, contemplating the architectural glories of ancient Athens or Rome, the poetic mind may feel that Socrates has hallowed the one place or Cicero the other, and be in enchantment at the remembrance of departed genius. Let us now suppose a case in which this argument will receive its most favourable illustration;—suppose a man in solitude, among the ruins of Athens, to be one who from learning and natural sensibility is capable of thought suited to such a place,—to be at the time even under the influence of those glorious ideas that make the poetry of Byron immortal: such a man might fold his arms and say within himself, "These are the ruins of that city whose people murdered Socrates,—here looking at that glorious sun which now I see, of wicked men he took the poisoned bowl." Here he might sigh; but if that sigh were answered from behind some broken columns, no doubt his emotion would then depend upon the voice; it might be that it would not be such as to dispel the sadness that does not offend. But if the voice, instead of harmonizing with the melancholy of the scene, were clamorous for beef-steaks, the veriest clown must know the poet's dream is gone, and his mind occupied by indignation, or, perhaps, a disposition to laughter. Then, if the association of ideas can be thus destroyed, we are not to be told that the argument for it is effectual when applied to edifices making but a second-hand appeal to the imagination. When we see coat-tails disappear in the entrance to Exeter Hall, are we dunces because we do not think of the Eleusinian mysteries, or because when we hear a speaker we are not reminded of Demosthenes by the pure Greek plaster of Paria honeyuckle above his head? Familiarity (if nothing else) will make us callous to these appeals from the architects.

If it be not presumptuous, I would mention some of the things that, in my opinion, should be used in the promotion of any style:—a fitness of design for the purposes of the building, to express which perfectly recourse must be had to sculpture or painting; geometrical proportions, for which we derive an admiration from natural objects; a constant endeavour to take advantage of the requirements of convenience and peculiarities of situation, which would often give to such an artist hints for the production of original beauty; decoration instead of concealment of constructive parts:—thus, when requisite to use iron beams or supports, it should be considered better to make them in themselves agreeable objects, than to encase them and make them wretched attempts at the expense of classic art. I would prefer the appearance of brickwork to that of stucco; but, wherever necessary to use that externally which needs the preserving quality of paint, I would thence endeavour to produce the pleasing by the means of paint; certainly it would not content me to adopt the colour now used, and which (so some say) is intended to represent freestone; neither, since iron work must be painted, do I think that the lead colour which satisfies the ambition of our architects, ought so to satisfy it,—a total disregard of, and contempt for the notion that culling monotonous "classic" will make it charm, or that by calling a lopsided or straggling building "Christian" or "Gothic," it will be in any way improved. Study of all styles and mastery of composition are essential to the man who would produce an original architecture more suited to our materials than the ancient styles. Whatever degree of credit we afford to him who adapts ancient styles, our utmost praise will belong to the producer,—there is no fear that his originality will be mistaken for that of ignorance. Be it ours, even when we see faults in his design, to applaud his endeavours and to encourage him in his progress.

# THE THOROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF LONDON.

Sir,—From the statements contained in your leading article of the 30th ult., I greatly fear that another opportunity for the improvement of the metropolis is about to be irretrievably lost, as it most assuredly will, be, if the suggestions of the "Metropolitan Improvement Commission" (which would be more properly termed the "Metropolitan Spoilation Commission") are carried out; and I therefore wish once more to raise a voice against any further perseverance in such an absurd, costly, and piecemeal system as at present obtains.

The necessity for a new grand line of thoroughfare, from the west end of Cheapside to the east end of Queen-street or Long Acre, is generally admitted, as such a line would tend very materially to relieve both Holborn and Newgate-street, and the Strand and Fleet-street; but such a line, to be effective, must be direct, and, to be carried out at least cost, must be done by one directing body, and in the shortest possible time. But there is no possibility of these requisites being complied with if the street is to be formed conjointly by the commission and the corporation, as proposed.

That it will not be direct, you, Mr. Editor, have shown; and the cost must of necessity be greater if carried out by two public bodies than if it were (as it ought to be) under the control of one efficient commission; and then, as to the time in which it is to be completed, if we may judge from the time that has been spent in merely talking about this projected new street (which you state at thirteen years), I will not venture to say that any of the present generation will live to make use of what they will have paid for.

The cost of forming an important thoroughfare such as this, would be, if properly executed, very materially reduced, if not altogether liquidated, by the increased value which would be obtained for the frontages; and, if speedily completed, the loss of rent during the time it was in operation would be very small, in comparison with what it must be at Victoria-street, alias New Farringdon-street, *et hoc genus omne*.

In your notice of this subject, Mr. Editor, you speak of Lincoln's Inn and Fields as "forbidden ground." I certainly cannot concur in that idea; and a properly-constituted "Improvement Commission" would not surely "knock under," if I may use the expression, to any public or private body, especially if such a course would injure or obstruct any public improvement.

Why, I would ask, is not the erection of all the courts of law in the vicinity of the Inns of Court and the new street (as proposed by Mr. Barry), and the widening of the Chancery-lane end of Fleet-street, included in the proposed plan?

But, however the proposed new street may be carried out, it will have the effect of further burthening Cheapside, if that is possible, unless, at the same time, another direct street is formed from London-bridge to St. Paul's. But the reply would be, the Improvement Commission must not venture within a small space in the heart of the metropolis, called the "City," as that is "forbidden ground." Again, therefore, this must be left to the corporation; and what will they do? Nothing, or worse than nothing! And so things go on, and ever will, unless the "thorough improvement of the whole of the metropolis, upon one specific and well-tigested plan" (without respect of persons, as benchers, aldermen, common councillors, &c. &c.), is intrusted to one efficient Improvement Commission, with ample powers, so as to obviate the necessity and consequent delay and cost of applications to Parliament in each case; and then Southwark, Lambeth, and the outskirts will receive a due share of attention, as well as the more wealthy quarters of the city and west-end.

Hoping, with you, for a better state of things, I remain, Sir, &c.,

A LONDONER.

# CITY UNION WORKHOUSE COMPETITION.

—We understand that fifty-one competitors have sent in plans for the City Union Workhouse. The designs are placed in a room in the Auction Mart by the Bank, and the decision will probably be arrived at in the beginning of the week.

\* We are glad to learn, that the society is progressing favourably, and has now eighty members. A card for the study of ornaments has been formed among the junior members. In reply to some correspondence, inquiries should address the secretary at Lyon's Inn Hall, Strand.